



Saudi Arabia Promotes Radical Wahhabism, Creates Breeding Ground for Terrorists

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Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have attacked their neighbor, Qatar, for supposedly supporting terrorism. They pretend to be firefighters, but spent years as arsonists.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has been consolidating power while posing as a reformer. The only positive so far of his de facto reign is his recent decision to liberalize Saudi social life. Women now can breathe and even drive.

However, he has not relaxed political or religious controls. Most important, while limiting the influence of fundamentalist clerics at home, he has not yet dropped the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's longstanding support for radical Islamism abroad.

The KSA spends as much as \$4 billion annually promoting its uniquely intolerant brand of Salafist Islamic thought, aimed at the "purification" of the faith known as Wahhabism. By enforcing this rigidly intolerant theology the KSA has acted like a housebroken version of the Islamic State.

Indeed, the two powers used the same school textbooks. Reported the New York Times, ISIS "circulates images of Wahhabi religious textbooks from Saudi Arabia in the schools it controls. Videos from the group's territory have shown Wahhabi texts plastered on the sides of an official missionary van."

Even some Saudi commentators noted that upwards of 4000 Saudi youth may have joined ISIS in Syria, second only to the number of Tunisians. Turkish cleric Mehmet Gormez asked a group of Saudi clerics about 45 Saudis executed for terrorist offences: "These people studied Islam for 10 or 15 years in your country. Is there a problem with the educational system"?

The Saudis have continued despite increased violent radicalism. Complained former Sen. Bob Graham, who served on the 9/11 commission: "They have continued, maybe accelerated their support for the most extreme form of Islam."

Wahhabism originated in the 18th Century. Political and religious officials formed a brutal partnership. As the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy reported: "Political obedience, then, was made an Islamic duty, and Salafist obedience was made a royal obligation."

In recent years the Saudi royals have spent \$3 to \$4 billion a year on educational fellowships and scholarships, Islamic clergy and scholars, academics and journalists, construction projects, operating funds, and school materials. Of particular concern is the Kingdom's educational efforts, which are directed at radicalizing all who use them.

Textbooks and other materials tend to show anyone who does not profess Wahhabist precepts in, shall we say, a bad light. Over the years a number of studies have found highly negative results.

Noted ICRD, "The consensus findings of these reports demonstrate a consistent pattern of using the educational curriculum to generate a climate of broad-based intolerance for non-Salafist identity groups." Despite promises of change hostility to others remains the basis of Saudi education.

Earlier this year David Andrew Weinberg of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies observed: "The language in 2016-2017 Saudi textbooks that calls for killing people who engage in adultery, anal sex, apostasy, or certain supposed acts of sorcery are not the only passages that encourage violence against those who act in a manner inconsistent with the state's vision of Islam."

Riyadh's lavish support for the otherwise marginal Islamic thought has radicalized Muslims globally. Argued Thomas Hegghammer, a Norwegian terrorism specialist, the Saudis have hindered the sort of moderating evolution seen in Christianity, most notably the Reformation and Second Vatican Council: "If there ever was going to be an Islamic reformation in the 20th Century, the Saudis probably prevented it by pumping out literalism."

Admittedly, Wahhabism's relationship with terrorism remains indirect. It essentially is a theology of hate and intolerance, or what the group Freedom House called an "ideology of religious hatred." Unfortunately, the ICRD warned: "A number of violent extremists around the world have reported that their radicalization first began when they were exposed to Salafist literature or websites." Manas Sen Gupta of the website TopYaps complained: "The Wahhabi doctrine will keep on creating terrorists who will keep on killing innocents.

Riyadh wants to play America's friend. However, as long as the KSA creates fertile ground for Islamic extremism, the U.S. is likely to find terrorists being created faster than they are being killed.

Indeed, Saudi Arabia's malign campaign may help explain why the more effort the U.S. puts into fighting extremist forces abroad, the more violent radicals Washington seems to find. The U.S. must convince its supposed ally to stop spreading hate around the globe.

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